Mindfulness Meditation Workshop

Self intros: what do you know about meditation and Buddhism? (10 min)

Orientation experiments (5 min):

(1) stop thinking for 30 seconds

(2) see intention to move finger

Orientation (10 min)

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction

Buddha's teaching = psychotherapy: *only* understanding and relieving stress. Not a religion, not philosophy, not ethics, not ideology, simply a practice of **seeing for yourself** how things are in the present moment. Powerful because present moment is all you have; past is memory (experienced now); future is fantasy (experienced now).

Higher level of practice, there's a greater "awakening" that can achieve a permanent transformation of your brain to a state far more positive than just relief from stress (*nibbana*). [Pierre's talk next week.]

The four truths (handout)

1. Life is full of stress. (*dukkha* = "off centered axel"; unsatisfactoriness)
2. The origin of stress is clinging to things being different than they are (greed, aversion, delusion). *"Suffering is rope-burn."*
3. Stress ends when you stop clinging. [*vipassana,* insight]
4. You can train your attention so that clinging stops [spiritual practice].

Spiritual practice is simply unbiased, non-conceptual awareness – observe cause-and-effect in your own mind. *Especially* knowing when you're lost in thought (thinking without knowing you're thinking)—it's not about knowing it in the abstract, but breaking the spell. The most basic skill is called mindfulness.

Wise attention perceives 3 characteristics of experience: unreliable, not self, stress. Wise attention sees that the stress arises from believing you can make things stay permanently and from identifying with mental contents as if they are your self. → *second arrow* (e.g., nose itch).

Mindfulness (*sati*)

Sati means remembering to pay attention to the present moment. In meditation, go further into concentration (*samadhi*).

Starting point is bare attention; not doing; not associating, not planning, not judging, not imagining, not wishing.

Disengage from storytelling by seeing your story as an object of attention: a thought happing now (you then see that it's not your self).

So what will you observe when you're mindful…?

The six senses

Seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, & thinking.

The five components of experience

1. Form (body and world; physical sense impressions)
2. Feeling tone (pleasant, unpleasant, neutral)
3. Perceptions (object recognition, categories)
4. Volitional formations (thoughts, intensions)
5. Consciousness

["Word for components means "bundles of firewood," fuel for clinging = burning]

Conventional notion of "self"

Something permanent, continuous, independent, and in control.

Mindful attention → no such self to be found.

Neuroscience: "free will" is preconscious.

Mindfulness meditation anchored on the breath

Can't attend to more than one thing at a time, so keeping attention on one object makes it easier to practice being in the present moment. Breath is always there.

When attention is caught by something else, just notice you're caught and bring attention back to breath.

When you're aware of an obsessive thought as an object of meditation, as a "sensation" happening now, it tends to fade away. Thoughts don't keep proliferating. Your mind gets more clear and calm. This is completely ***involuntary***. You don't make it happen. It happens on it's own.

When anything that arises can be an object of your attention, then you see that it's not me, you don't take it so seriously, it changes for the better automatically, "you" don't do anything.

Ultimately this creates a state of contentment regardless of what you're doing. "Happiness independent of circumstances." Your life may be the same, but your relationship to your life will be different.

The five hindrances (to being mindful)

Desire. Aversion. Sleepiness. Restlessness. Doubt.

Prepare to meditate

"Few words to get started, then timer for 20 minutes. Close eyes, grounded…

"Notice sounds. Notice ringing in ears. Another constant object you can use…

"Notice breath. Don't control it, natural. Choose location. Resting in it…

"When you find yourself lost in thought, don't worry or analyze, just return to the breath. The act of beginning again, over and over, is the essential training… If you forget what you're supposed to be doing, just come back to the breath…

"If distracted by a stronger sensation, can choose to stay on that sensation and feel it change. It can be your meditation object temporarily…

Now its time to pay attention to what's present. Repeat."

20-minute meditation

For 2nd hour Discussion:

Self A1: How can something that doesn't have any of your characteristics be you?

Self A2: If self is the same as these, then it is constantly arising and passing, so self is constantly arising and passing, has no independent and constant quality, only a dependently arisen series of events. (Not how we usually think of a self.)

—Either way, there's no I-me-mine as an independent thing.

Mindfulness can be more active: replacement.

Default network – egocentric/allocentric – new = attention.

Look at the gaps.

Illusions: blind spot, square.

Samvega: "disgust with what you've been feeding on," shock, feeling foolish.

Time to look at sample books.